

Cooktown Botanic Gardens

places to be



The Gardens are a four hour drive north of Cairns. Cooktown lies on the Endeavour River where the James Cook Expedition put in to repair their ship after running aground on the Reef in 1770.

During their sojourn, botanists Daniel Solander and Joseph Banks collected plants and recorded a traditional plant classification system in use by the Aborigines of the Endeavour Valley. This is reflected on the label plates, some of which show the Guugu Yimithirr name.

Cooktown Botanic Gardens aims to exhibit all the specimens collected by the Cook Expedition.

Laid out in a gardenesque style in 1878, the grounds were used by the Queensland Acclimatisation Society to trial economic plants of which 30 still exist. It was neglected after 1917, and revived in 1980. A Solander section was added to reflect the specimens collected on the 1770 Expedition and the old stone pools and watercourse were rebuilt.



The noted botanical illustrator Vera Scarth-Johnson bequeathed her works to the people of Cooktown, and in 1999, Nature's Powerhouse was built in the Gardens to exhibit her works. This facility houses an interactive wildlife display which features the work of the late herpetologist Charles Tanner. Wildlife of Cape York Peninsula is displayed here, and the subjects of Vera's illustrations are cultivated around the building. Vera's Café serves inexpensive upmarket style refreshments.

A walking track leads through the Gardens, past the Solander section, Palmetum and stone pools to Finch Bay. It passes through a grove of mangos which were planted in 1880. Across the stone-pitched watercourse is the Main Lawn, which features original specimens, and tropical fruit trees. Visitors are welcome to sample the ripe fruit in season.

Open 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.